CLAIMS

1.   A method of distributing vendibles using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an object containing at least human-readable information and machine-readable codes identifying vendibles;

scanning one of said machine-readable codes containing information identifying a desired vendible using the scanner;

storing the machine-readable code in a memory;

optionally obtaining and storing in the memory a user input information further identifying the desired vendible;

sending the stored information and information identifying the user to the portal server via the network;

receiving the said information at the portal server;

selecting a supplier of said desired vendible; and

sending to at least one of said user and said selected supplier information identifying the other of said user and said selected supplier.

2.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, further comprising the step of supplying said vendibles at a location indicated by said information identifying the user.

3.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

sending from the portal server to the receiver information identifying a location of said supplier; and

providing said vendibles to said user at said location of said supplier.

4.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

identifying a plurality of said suppliers;

procuring information from said suppliers with respect to vendibles supplied by each of said plurality of suppliers; and

selecting one from said plurality of suppliers.

5.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, wherein said scanner determines the current location of said scanner;

wherein the said information identifying the user comprises information identifying the determined location of said scanner; and

wherein said step of selecting a supplier includes selecting a supplier convenient to the identified location of said scanner.

6.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 5, wherein said scanner comprises a receiver for broadcast signals indicative of the location of said scanner.

7.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 6, wherein said receiver for broadcast signals is a Global Positioning System receiver.

8.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, wherein the suppliers are mobile, further comprising the step of determining the current locations of possible suppliers, and wherein the step of selecting a supplier comprises comparing the current locations of possible suppliers and the user.

9.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, wherein the step of selecting a supplier comprises auctioning the information received at the portal server among at least two possible suppliers.

10.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, which comprises:

running on the portal server a plurality of supplier processes, all supporting a standard interface;

receiving the said information at the portal server in standard form;

identifying a supplier or suppliers pertinent to the vendible in question; and

transferring the said information to at least one supplier process pertinent to the vendible in question.

11.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, which comprises tracking at the portal server a part of the transaction value payable to the supplier.

12.   A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, wherein the object is a vendible, wherein the machine-readable code identifies that vendible, and which comprises supplying to the user a repeat order of the same vendible.

13.   A method of communicating news information via a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a printed medium containing information including human-readable news information and a machine-readable code containing a link information related to the human-readable news information;

scanning the machine-readable code from the printed medium using the scanner;

storing the machine-readable code in a memory;

extracting the link information from the machine readable code in the memory;

optionally obtaining and storing user input information in the memory;

sending the link information and the user input information to the portal server via the network;

receiving the link information and the user input information at the portal server;

selecting by the portal server a multimedia news information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information;

sending the multimedia information sequence to the receiver via the network;

receiving and storing the multimedia information sequence at the receiver; and

playing the multimedia information sequence via the receiver.

14.   A method of communicating news information according to claim 13, further comprising the steps of:

storing the link information and the user input information at the portal server;

identifying newly-available multimedia news information;

selecting a newly-available multimedia news information sequence relevant to the stored news information and user input information;

sending the newly-available multimedia information sequence to the receiver via the network;

receiving and storing the multimedia information sequence at the receiver; and

playing the multimedia information sequence via the receiver.

15. A system for communicating information via a telecommunications network by initiating a communication from an object containing scannable provider information, the system comprising:

telecommunications apparatus including a scanner comprising a memory, the scanner receiving data by scanning from said object and storing said data in said memory, the data comprising link information corresponding to the provider information,

a user interface for receiving user input information, the user input information capable of being stored in the memory;

the telecommunications apparatus being connected to the network for communicating the link information and the user input information via the network and receiving information via the network; and

a portal server in communication with the telecommunications apparatus via the network, the portal server receiving the link information and the user input information, selecting an information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information, and causing the information sequence to be transmitted via the network to the telecommunications apparatus.

16. A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the said telecommunications apparatus comprises a telephone, and wherein the portal server transmits information to the telephone in the form of synthesized speech.

17. A system for communicating information according to claim 16, wherein the portal server communicates with a user by means of synthesized speech replayed by the telephone to the user and user input entered on a keypad of the telephone.

18. A system for communicating information according to claim

15, wherein the scanner scans information from a printed medium.

19.   A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the said telecommunications apparatus is a pager which displays text, and wherein the portal server transmits information in the form of text to be displayed on such a pager.

20.   A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the telecommunications apparatus includes a facsimile machine for receiving information from the telecommunications network, and the portal server sends facsimile messages that include codes readable by the said scanner.

21.   A method of commercial administration using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

generating a written record of a transaction, which record includes machine-readable code identifying at least the transaction and a database containing records of the transaction and accessible from the network via the portal server;

scanning said machine-readable code using the scanner;

storing the machine-readable code in a memory;

optionally obtaining and storing a user input information;

sending the stored information and information identifying the user to the portal server via the network;

receiving the said information at the portal server; and

accessing the records of the transaction in the said database.

22.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, which comprises downloading from the database to the receiver the records of the transaction.

23.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, wherein the written record is a receipt, and which comprises importing the downloaded records into an expense accounting system.

24.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, which comprises automatically transferring funds to pay a debt created by the transaction.

25.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, which comprises appending information identifying the user to the database.

26.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 25, wherein the transaction is a sale, and the database contains product and purchaser information.

27.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 25, which comprises using the product and purchaser information for warranty administration.

28.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 25, which comprises using the product and purchaser information for maintenance contract administration.

29.   A method of commercial administration according to claim 25, which comprises using the product and purchaser information for the supply of upgrades.

30.   A method of contact administration using a network

connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

distributing business cards that identify and provide contact details for a person and include machine-readable code at least identifying the said person;

scanning said machine-readable code using the scanner;

storing the machine-readable code in a memory;

sending the stored information and information identifying a user to the portal server via the network;

receiving the said information at the portal server;

storing in a database associated with the said person at least the information identifying the said user; and

notifying at least some users identified in the said database of changes in the contact details of the said person.

31.   A method of contact administration according to claim 30, comprising automatically notifying all users identified in the said database of changes in the contact details of the said person.

32.   A method of contact administration according to claim 31, comprising the repeated step of deleting users from the database.

33.   A method of contact administration according to claim 30, comprising the step of reviewing the users identified in the database when a change in the contact details of the said person occurs, and notifying only some said users of the change.

34.   Apparatus for selection of entertainment programs, comprising:

a printed medium containing entries giving human-readable

information on respective available entertainment programs, and each including a machine-readable code;

a scanner for scanning the machine readable codes;

a portal server connected to said scanner via a network; and

a receiver connected to said portal server via said network;

said scanner being capable of transmitting said scanned code to said portal server; and

said portal server being responsive to said transmitted scan to transmit said entertainment program to said receiver.

35.   Apparatus according to claim 34, wherein said portal server causes said user to be charged for viewing said program.

36.   Apparatus for selection of entertainment programs, comprising:

a printed medium containing entries giving human-readable information on respective available entertainment programs, and each including a machine-readable code;

a scanner for scanning the machine readable codes;

a portal server connected to said scanner via a network; and

a receiver connected to said portal server via said network;

said scanner being capable of transmitting said scanned code to said portal server; and

said portal server being responsive to said transmitted scan to transmit to said receiver information enabling said receiver to show said entertainment program to a user.

37.   Apparatus according to claim 36, wherein said machine-readable code includes data identifying a time and channel for a television program,

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and said responsive apparatus comprises a video recorder.